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CHAPTER II

THE BEDOUIN OF CYRENAICA

I

In the last chapter I recorded the development of the Sanusiya. In this chapter I give a brief description of Cyrenaica and of the way of life of the Bedouin who live there and an equally brief account of the history of these Bedouin and of their tribal system.

The geographical isolation of Cyrenaica proper, the large peninsula which juts into the Mediterranean from the Bay of al-Sallum to the eastern Sirtica, has greatly affected its history. It is cut off from the Nile Delta by 700 km. of semi-desert and from Tripolitania by 650 km. of the Sahara round the shores of the Sirtica, while to the south of it stretch endless desert wastes, for Cyrenaica proper is only just over 200,000 sq. km. with a Saharan hinterland of over 500,000 sq. km. On the other hand the coast of Cyrenaica lies only 300 km. from Crete and 400 km. from the Greek mainland, and it belongs by climate and vegetation to Europe.

The physiographic features of the country which influence to any extent the life of its people can rapidly be summarized. Northern Cyrenaica is a calcareous mountain rising to a table-land, *al-Jabal al-Akhdar*, the Green Mountain, so called from its evergreen forests. To the north its slopes rise steeply from the sea or its littoral, while to the south it billows gently towards the great Saharan desert. The two major divisions of the country are known as *al-jabal*, the mountain—or *al-ghaba*, the forest, since its northern part is covered with bush—and *al-barr*, the steppe. The mountain and the steppe alike fall into a number of zones, the principal of which are shown in the accompanying sketch-map. There is a narrow strip of coastal plain which broadens towards Banghazi and then spreads south-westwards into the great *barqa* plain. Animal transport can only mount the plateau from the coast by steep and infrequent paths which lead up deep ravines to the first terrace, the so-called *arqub* country, a succession of thickly wooded ridges broken into myriad bosses and cut deep by many wide wadis,

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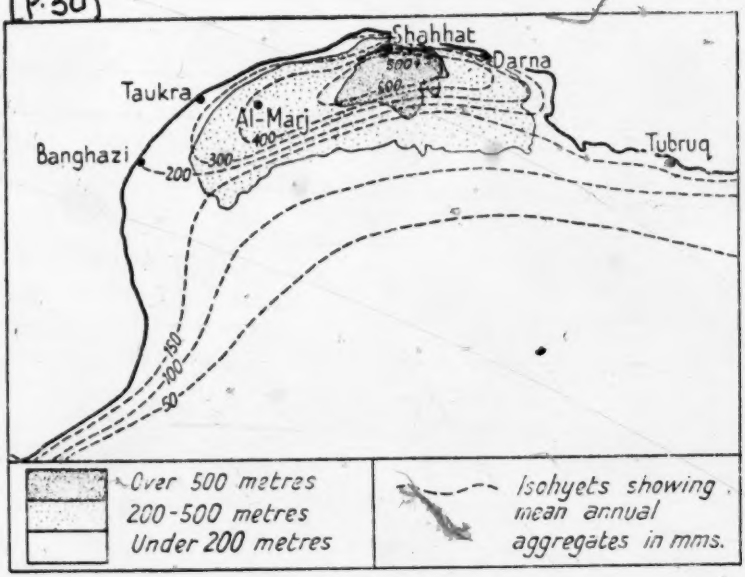

Rainfall and the Plateau Area.

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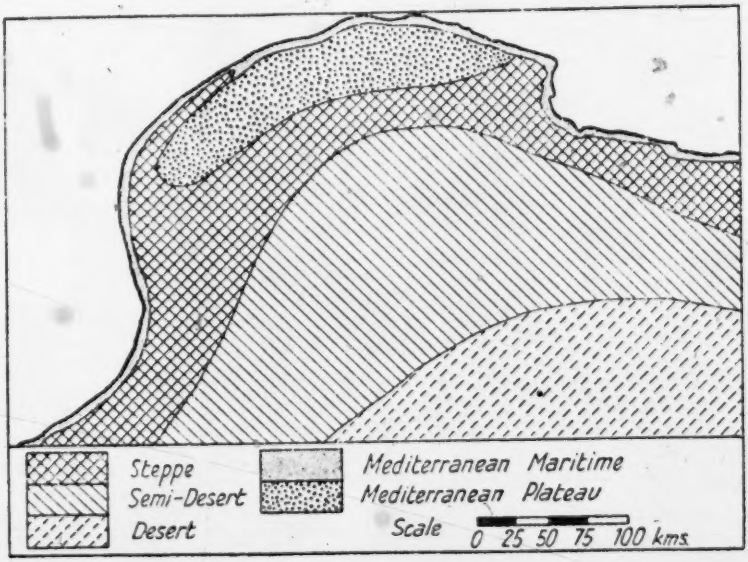

Climatic Zones.

3:Evans-Pritchard E-4, 5 (1942-1944) 1949 MT9 Libyan Bedouin MT9
(1837-1942) Sanusi

of country. The whitish soils of the steppe support worts and other scrub bushes and some drought-resisting trees in the beds of wadis and they are well covered with annual and perennial grasses and other plants which yield excellent pasturage in the springtime. However, except in the Wadi al-Mra, where camels can be kept the year round, there is little grazing beyond the line Msus–Bir Tinjidhir–Bir Hakaim.

The Bedouin of the forest area are essentially a goat people, though they also keep many sheep and cattle, and it is mostly through the medium of the goat that the vast natural wealth of the forests of Cyrenaica is transformed into human wealth. The animal is hardy and frugal, and has the great merit of preferring tree and shrub to grass and of being a catholic feeder. Just as the forest would be useless to the Bedouin without the goat so the much vaster stretches of steppe would be useless to them without the sheep and camel which turn its grasses and scrub into food. Thus Cyrenaica is fundamentally a pastoral country, primarily a country of sheep farming, and its people, as they say themselves, have the hearts of shepherds and not of peasants. While agriculture and pastoralism are both practised, the bias of nature and tradition is towards animal husbandry, by which the rich vegetation of the country is turned into milk, butter, meat, wool, hides, and draught and transport.

II

In Cyrenaica stand always contrasted the mountain and the plain, the forest and the steppe, the red soils and the white, the region of goats and cows and the region of sheep and camels, settled life and nomadism.

True nomadism is very rare. A few Fawakhir, Minifa, Huta, and other tribal fragments herd only camels, or if they possess other animals keep them with kinsmen near the plateau, and can therefore wander pretty well where they please. They may be found anywhere between the Nile, Fazzan, and the Sudan. Their spirit is that of an Aulad 'Ali tribesman who said to me: 'We call no place our home. It is wherever there is grass and water.' Semi-nomads are numerous. Those with land on the plateau cultivate there, then graze southwards, and return again to the plateau in the dry season to water their flocks.

4: Peters E-5 (1948-1950) 1970 MT9 Libyan Bedouin MT9
Cyrenaica

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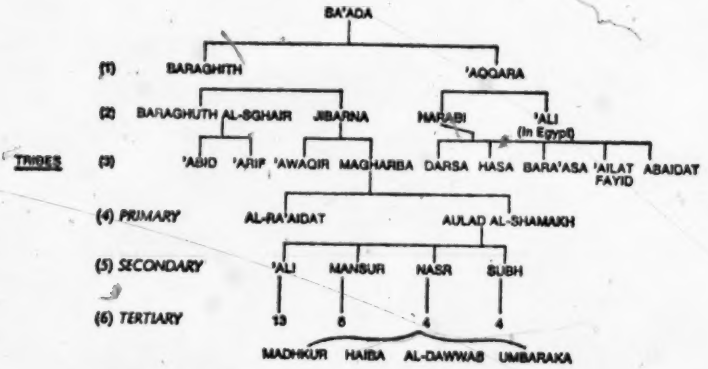
BA'ADA
(1) BARAGHITH 'AQQARA
(2) BARAGHUTH AL-SGHAIR JIBARNA HARABI 'ALI (In Egypt)
TRIBES (3) 'ABID 'ARIF 'AWAQIR MAGHARIBA DARSA HASA BARA'ASA 'AILAT FAYID ABAIDAT
(4) PRIMARY AL-RA'AIDAT AULAD AL-SHAMAKH
(5) SECONDARY 'ALI MANSUR NASR SUBH
(6) TERTIARY 13 6 4 4
MADHKUR HAIBA AL-DAWWAS UMBARAKA

FIG. 18-1 GENEALOGY 1. The names given in this genealogy are the tribal names in use. All are derivatives of personal names of ancestors, like all tribal names, except for some nicknames (e.g. Baraghith means 'the fleas') and a few which refer to a general location (e.g. the Magharba means the 'Westerners'). [551]

first four descending generations is two. At the fifth level the number increases to four and finally, at the sixth level there characteristically occurs a marked irregularity in the number of descendants forming the founding ancestors of the tertiary sections.

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Another feature of the Cyrenaican genealogy is that its branches show an intimate relationship with ecological areas. Thus, the major division into two branches stemming from Sa'ada represents the eastern and western halves of the country with associated and clear differences in ecology. Continuing the line of descent, the Jibarna and Baraghith groups of tribes occupy plain and mountain foot-hills respectively. The two Jibarna tribes in turn occupy two distinct kinds of plain. Following now the division of the Magharba tribe, its two primary sections are divided by a very conspicuous dry valley. The four secondary divisions of the Aulad ash-Shamakh primary section likewise show a relation to ecological boundaries, albeit on a smaller scale than those previously referred to, but none the less important in this more local context. Finally, the unevenly numbered tertiary sections which are derived from these four

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4: Peters E-5 (1948-1950) 1970 MT9 Libyan Bedouin MT9
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secondary sections, in their very unevenness, show a more sensitive relation to more detailed ecological differences.

At all levels of segmentation, therefore, a high degree of consistency between the ecological divisions of the country and the genealogical divisions can be shown. Indeed the relationship is so close that it is tempting to consider the contemporary pattern of things as the only one possible. What historical evidence exists is against such a view being taken. It is known that tribes [167] have been displaced in the past, some of them or sections of them having been pushed out into Egypt, and others having altered their position. This being so, there obviously cannot be any finality about the present distribution of tribes in relation to the ecological divisions of the country. Rather, the existing pattern is one of a number of possible permutations. Again, as the relation between groups of people to their environment becomes progressively sensitive with the decrease in the size and order of the group, then the more unstable will be the relationship between the two. Conversely the greater the size and order of the group the more persistent will be its relationship to the ecology. In other words, the major ecological divisions are more fundamental in their effect on the way of life and the economy of people, whereas the more detailed ecological differences between, say, tertiary sections have a relatively minor effect. The [233] ecological differences between the wooded plateau area with [433] its cow and goat herding economy, and the arid semi-desert area with its camel and sheep herding economy has a much more profound effect on the general way of life, and is a more persistent division, than that which exists between two tertiary sections where the differences may only be in topographical details.

While therefore, the division of people into groups of various sorts is not permanently fixed in relation to ecological divisions, there is always an intimate relationship between the two which is progressively more enduring as the order of the structural segment increases. Yet even this statement of the relationship, guarded as it is, does not suffice, for the pattern and distribution of tribes and their sections at any given moment are not only a function of ecology, but they are also the result of a number of other complex factors which may be operating to reinforce or to

complicate the more direct relationship of the distribution of groups of people to the ecology.[3]

The Cyrenaican genealogy, then, is a conceptualization of a hierarchy[4] of ordered territorial segments. The groups stemming from the ancestor at the third order of segmentation are referred to as tribes, and each tribe is the apex of a three-tiered order of segments, which, following customary practice, are referred to as primary, secondary, and tertiary. The latter, the tertiary segment, represents the group of people who, for a period of six to eight months, gather together and live in what, for all intents and purposes, is a single discrete residential group.[5] This tertiary group is also the smallest political group. It has its own homeland, with its water supplies, pastures, and ploughland. In this homeland live most of its members. It is a lineage segment, and most of the agnates of this segment live on their own homeland.[6] It is also the vengeance group, which means that any one of its members can be killed in vengeance for a homicide committed by any other, and that the obligation to exact vengeance falls on all members alike, regardless of relationship to the victim. Likewise, its members pay blood money as a group, and although when they receive it, a bigger portion goes to the nearest agnate of the victim, the remainder is distributed equally among all its members. The number of generations which supervene between the founding ancestor of a tertiary segment and the living is usually four or five, but there is little consistency in this number. Some tertiary

[3] This part of the discussion is necessarily brief, but further amplification will appear in two subsequent articles now in preparation, one of which is concerned with a general treatment of Cyrenaican genealogies, and the other with a discussion of the effects of ecology on the social organization of the Bedouin.

[4] I use the word hierarchy here since, although segments of any order display many like features, the orders represent distinct and progressively more embracing interests, and these differences are of such consequence that to consider one order of groups as a facsimile of a superior or inferior order can only lead to confusion. A tertiary group, that is to say, may possess many of the characteristics of a secondary group, but the one is a fundamentally different sort of group from the other, as I shall show in my forthcoming article on the feud. (cf. Smith, M. G. 1956.)

[5] This statement does not apply to the Darsa and the Hasa tribes, two of the plateau tribes in Cyrenaica. The statements in this article are confined almost exclusively to the camel herders of the semi-desert.

[6] This, admittedly, is too general a statement to make about such an important issue, but I would prefer to leave its documentation and precision for an article on the analysis of the composition of Bedouin camps.